

BoyleSports

Don't just bet. Choose Wisely.

SATURDAY 3PM CHAMPIONSHIP SPECIAL

Over 1.5 goals in all 3pm matches

Was 5/1

Now 7/1

18+. Online customers & in shop for BoyleXtra cardholders. Max 10. T&C's Apply. Bet Responsibly - GamblingCare.ie

Migration and sport paint dazzling picture of a modern Ireland

LONDON In late July is a sauna by a different name. That was certainly the case in 2012 at the ExCeL Arena and the opening weekend of boxing at the Olympics. Even the walls were sweating and Ireland coach Billy Walsh needed a moment to catch his breath after the last fight of the day. But his eyes were flashing and he wore a broad grin. Not only had all his boxers won their opening fights, the massive Irish support in the venue had raised the roof. It was put to Walsh that it was an unexpected bonus, he wasn't having any of it. "Half the country is Irish, sure didn't we build the bloody place!" It was yet another reminder of the massive impact of emigration and migration on Irish life – and sport is no different.

Migrant Walsh himself is now a migrant in Colorado, guiding Team USA's fortunes. Having a keen interest in boxing history, he knows the story of Marty O'Brien. His real name was Martin Sinatra – his son could sing a bit... but he boxed under that pseudonym as Irish migrants in America had such a dominant role in the fight game. It's 100 years since Ireland first competed at the Olympics as an independent nation, but Irish athletes won plenty of Olympic medals before 1924. Most came in the colours of the US, with the storied Irish Whales dominating throwing events. This summer's Olympics in Paris will be a perfect illustration of the positive impact that migration has had on Irish sport. Much focus will be on sprint star Rhasidat Adeleke, born in Dublin to Nigerian parents. Rower Sanita Puspure, at 42, is chasing quali-

CONNECTION: Rhasidat Adeleke and Mick McCarthy

EDITOR: David Coughlan
CONTRIBUTORS: Kieran Cunningham, Garry Doyle, Derek Foley, Karl O'Kane, Mark McCadden

NOW AND THEN: Jason Sherlock now and (below) celebrating a goal for Dublin in 1995

'The last thing you want growing up is to be singled out for the colour of your skin, your nationality or your race...'

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1995, Jason Sherlock made history.

The son of a mother from Finglas and a father from Hong Kong, he became the first mixed-race winner of an All-Ireland. That was nearly three decades ago, but you can count those who've matched his feat on the fingers of one hand. Dublin's Craig Dias and Stefan Okunbur of Kerry in football, Cork's Seán Og O hAilpin in hurling. But, by the time the bicentenary of the GAA comes around in 2084, it may well be the norm for county teams to have mixed race players on board. Sherlock will always have that little slice of history, but it took him a while to fully accept his background. "The last thing you want growing up is to be singled out for the colour of your skin, your nationality or your race," he said. "Certainly, from my perspective, I wanted to be accepted. To be called a Dub was the best thing that I could be called, and to be seen as a Dub. "I was very reluctant to accept and embrace that side. My mother and father weren't together so I didn't have a huge connection with my father and his family at the time.

Heritage

"I didn't embrace that side of my heritage and I was very happy to live in a world where I was just a Dub like everyone else." Sherlock credits a documentary he made with RTE in instigating a seachange in how he viewed his identity and his heritage. He was still a teenager when that fateful year of 1995 drew to a close, and a phone call out of the blue left him curiously flat. The call told him that his father, Denis Leung, had been murdered

in South Africa. Sherlock didn't have any real relationship with him and doesn't recall actually grieving. Indeed, he played in the League of Ireland for UCD that night. But, when the documentary came around, he dug a little deeper into Leung and the Chinese part of his ancestry. "Post playing, I was at a stage where I was trying to understand how I got to where I got to. I'd seen a lot of negatives with my mixed race background but, as I got older and understood things a bit more, I had a lot more appreciation and acceptance of it," he said. "Being asked to do a sports documentary...I'm realistic enough to know there's far more talented players and more successful players who deserved a documentary so it was important to me that, if I was doing one, I'd address things that I hadn't really explored myself. That was my father and his heritage and to live in his last footsteps - that was important to me. "It has given me a far greater appreciation of his life and the challenges that he faced. Coming to Ireland, looking for work, looking for a life, having to leave brothers and sisters at home, and

ISEIR

BoyleSports

Don't just bet. Choose Wisely.

SATURDAY 3PM CHAMPIONSHIP SPECIAL

Over 1.5 goals in all 3pm matches

Was 5/1

Now 7/1

18+. Online customers & in shop for BoyleXtra cardholders. Max 10. T&C's Apply. Bet Responsibly - GamblingCare.ie

THE GAME CHANGER

COACH TRIP: Jayo while coaching with Dublin and (right) celebrating the 1995 All-Ireland win with teammate Paul Bealin

'I did start to feel old last week when everyone was talking about Luke Littler!'

Kieran CUNNINGHAM EXCLUSIVE kieran.cunningham@thedaily.ie

All-Ireland champ on his heritage and diversity in GAA

of weeks back, one from 1994 had The Outhere Brothers' performing 'Boom Boom Boom'. The following summer, it was adapted as a Hill 16 anthem in praise of Sherlock. His Twitter handle is BoomJayo. That says something. I've always appreciated what the GAA has done for me. I'll always view it as special. "Actually, I did start to feel old last week when everyone was talking about Luke Littler. There was a discussion on the radio and they were bringing up other teenage stars in their sport. "Various names were mentioned and I was thinking 'do you not remember me, I was only 19?' I was hoping to get a shout out, so that made me feel old!" Sherlock is now coaching Westmeath, and one of the players he works with is Liberia native Boidu Sayeh. That is the new GAA, a far more diverse organisation than in the past. "Definitely, when I was growing up, there weren't as many people of mixed heritage going around. My heroes were the likes of Paul McGrath and Chris Hughton, guys like that. "I knew they weren't typically Irish but everyone treated them as Irish heroes," said Sherlock. "It goes without saying that our classrooms are different now in terms of the colour and creed of our young boys and girls. "There's an acceptance that's required and that diversity brings so much to society and to our sports. I've always felt that sport reflects society and the GAA has been always a leader in being inclusive. "It feels like all my life that racism has been an issue. It was there when I was playing in the 1990s. "And I'd hope that the GAA would continue to lead in challenging racism in sport and racism in society."

Proud

Sherlock is happy in his skin these days. Still a proud Dub, but one that knows Leung as well as Sherlock is part of his DNA. "I went to New York for Paddy's Day last year and was watching the parade. There

were Guards marching in the parade and a couple of them recognised me. They dragged me out from the crowd and I joined the parade with them," he said. "It was caught on video and it was strange because social media wasn't a thing for most of the time that I was playing but that video clip got tens of thousands of views online. Sherlock added: "What I loved about it was the common theme in what people had to say about the video - that it was so Irish. To be in New York and to be part of a situation where Guards pull a former Irish sportsman out of a crowd. I was very heartened by that. I always wanted to be seen as one of us."